

# Why we Want Irrigation as an Adjunct to Dry Farming.



## AN ADDRESS

By

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With Discussion by MR. C. JENSEN, *of Magrath.*

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# Why we Want Irrigation as an Adjunct to Dry Farming.

The subject that has been assigned to me is: "Why we want Irrigation as an adjunct to Dry Farming." After all that has been said I do not know that I have anything to add. The main reason we want irrigation as an adjunct to dry farming is because it has been so dry. If the dry farming had not been quite so dry no one in my section would be demanding irrigation; because of the great possibilities there are in wheat growing by dry-farming methods. The fear has been expressed that this country is about to be emptied of people if we do not get irrigation. If it should be, which I do not believe, it would be taken up again by more people who would come to grow wheat, and they will come as long as the climate stays as it is. If that ever exhausts itself, we will do something else under dry conditions. I believe in dry farming and I am rather convinced that it is a better proposition, but we are not all built for that thing. Personally, I do not want to potter around in water. When we see the results of irrigation such as on the farm at Ronalane, we feel it is best, but some of us do not like irrigation. Had these last years averaged as high as 1915-16, do you realize that the dry farmers or wheat growers on the \$20 land would have received a gross return of from \$180 to \$300 per acre? Do you realize also that one man with a six-horse team will handle 320 acres? Had we had three years averaging 1915-1916 there would have been a gross return to one man on a half section farm of from \$45,000 to \$70,000. That is the stake we play for. Always you will find men willing to play for the big stake and you will find men to farm the prairies. The main reason I want irrigation as an adjunct to dry farming is because it has been just a little too dry, and we want it for the assurance of crop so that we shall not be left as we have been too frequently with nothing. We see beautiful promise in the spring with rainfalls, and then comes the withering down, and I do hate to see the plows going along in a cloud of dust.

I have spoken about the big inducement or stake there is, but we have to remember that the future of wheat might not be too certain. There are large areas of the world being brought under wheat production and we cannot count on always having a market for the wheat. Under our present farming conditions and market conditions, the dry farmer should grow wheat, but he cannot always do it.

Then we want irrigation for the growing of alfalfa, because with it, we can do something else. Editors, experts, bankers, ministers of the government and, in fact, all prophets, have told us and preached to us the gospel of live stock, and it is a good gospel. We find in practical experience that truth is this to me and that to thee, and we find that the gospel of live stock in southern Alberta is an error. There is no salvation for the dry farmer in the south country with livestock. When the dry years come the men with stock are in a worse position than the so-called "soil miner." Give us irrigation and we will have alfalfa. In the year 1914, I know that pigs that could not be given away were simply knocked on the head to get rid of them. The gospel of live stock is no gospel to the dry farmer. Give us irrigation as an adjunct to dry farming, and you have a combination that cannot be beaten.

Further, I love to grow wheat and I love dry farming. I love this broad, wind-swept prairie. I love these treeless expanses. I love the thrill of it; the expansiveness of it, and the terror of it in the winter days. I feel sorry for Mr. Peters and Mr. Dowling and newspaper men who do not know the feeling of making furrows in the bare prairie with only the blue sky above them; then to watch the blades of grain coming up; then some fine autumn morning to sail away at the head of a battery of binders and cut the golden crop. There is a thrill in that; I would live through ten dry years just for the hope of getting that thrill again. I did not get it this year, but I suppose it is a fact that when we keep on taking out from the soil those chemicals necessary to grow the wheat without replacing those plant foods, the soil will become such that wheat cannot be grown on it at a profit.

#### IRRIGATION, ALFALFA, LIVE STOCK, MANURE, FERTILITY PROLONGED.

I am nearly through now. We have also seen during the last spring all along the road allowance brown soils drifting in not so much to the country east of here—in the country where I come from—but in the country West of Lethbridge and North of Lethbridge on the line to Calgary. The ditches are being filled with the most fertile part of the soil. I have heard of fields from which the top had been entirely blown—crop, seed, field and all. The soil drifts like snow in winter.

Mr. Mitchell outlined one manner in which this can be prevented or which would help to stop it—the planting of rows of trees through your fields. We might have to do that. I do not like fences or barriers. I want to swing right across and not have to cultivate in one direction. We might as well irrigate entirely as do that. If as an adjunct to dry farming we can put on a half section farm fifty acres of water this year and rotate the crops, putting in the alfalfa from time to time on the land or the legumes, thus planting those plants that would return the nitrogen to the soil, then we have a proposition that cannot be beaten.

They say, in the East, that the West is too materialistic. They say we are entirely after the almighty dollar. We do chase it here; but we perhaps do not pinch it so hard. I want to tell you that the West is not so materialistic. The people in the West are people of vision and they have for years lived on the substance of things hoped for. We want irrigation for the human values that are embraced in the one word “home” and all that it means. There is not a man here in the materialistic West who wants dollars for dollars. He wants them for what they will do. He wants them for the values they can procure for him and for what they will do to minister to what is deepest in him and to give him a home and to realize the aspirations he is interested in.

Indulge me in one little dream. I look forward to the future and I see across this country a great golden belt of grain and I see those sky ships floating across from ocean to ocean and coast to coast and passengers looking down on the golden grain studded with clusters of gems—the emeralds of the prairie—linked together by silver threads—the ditches of Mr. Peters—and water flowing in them and in those green spots the cattle will be fatter and the horses more magnificent. The gardens will be greener and the houses will be finer and the schools better and the towns larger and more flourishing. The homes will be better and the women more beautiful.

I say that it is for the dream that we want irrigation as an adjunct to dry farming.

CHAIRMAN: We will now call upon Mr. C. Jensen, of Magrath, to address you.

MR. JENSEN: After hearing the address delivered by Mr. Baker, of Nemiscam, I fear I have a hard task on my hands.

I want to say a few words about my experience in irrigation. I love to potter in the water. Give me a shovel and I am at home, and I want to tell you that when Mr. Peters came to our country last winter and said there was plenty of water in the country to irrigate all these board prairies, my heart was filled with joy, and I am going to tell you why. I come from a country that was dry. We learned in that country the lesson of fall irrigation in the school of hard knocks. I remember well when we took the first canal out of the river in the State of Utah. We were poor indeed, and we had only a few poor tools, but it was irrigate or starve. We had no place to go and no money to go to any place with, so we had to dig a ditch and use the ditch to the best of our ability. When we got it built, there was no water and we went to look for it and found that the soil had sunk down and the water went down too. Finally we overcame that and we put the water on the land in small furrows and away went the water and the land and we had no crop that year. My father said to me, "My boy, stick. I never saw a man in the world who got any place who was a quitter." Later on a canal was taken out above us and we poor fellows had no water so they called it "Want Canal," because there was no water.

In the meantime, we heard about Canada and this soil. Somebody said to us that you can grow magnificent crops without irrigation, and they kept telling us about it and one by one my neighbors came to this country and they wrote and said what a wonderful country it is, the best government they could find, a country where there was British fair-play and where you had religious freedom. We came here and began to cultivate the soil. In 1903 we had a wet year. In 1904 and 1905 it was dry. We had a few cattle when we came to the country in 1903 and in the month of May we had a snow storm that drove half of our cattle into the river and they died. When 1904 and 1905 came around we lost our crops and began to feel the pinch, but in that time there was a lot of dead grass laying around on the prairie, and we went out and got that hay and fed it to our cattle and they ate it because they could not get anything else. Then we had better crops for a while and were building up and then came 1910. At that particular time there was a man going through the country and he said, down in the State of Nebraska we have learned to cultivate very extensively and you will all have a crop. We all believed him. Along came another fellow who had been practising this method and his land was well worked up and we had a terrific rain in the morning with puddles of water all over. Then the sun came out and warmed up the earth and then came the dry winds and towards evening this man came rushing in to the store and said, "This is the most confounded country I ever lived in. I have been going around all day with a pair of rubber boots on to keep the water out of my feet and goggles on my eyes to keep out the dust." Then he went away and came back and found his soil had all gone and was sailing around the roads and neighbors fences. He gave up the practise then of intensive farming. Then we began to think that we should start something that will stick and they told us to go into mixed farming. The government suggested cattle, sheep and hogs, and I had been raising hogs for seven or eight years and we sold four or five hundred hogs yearly. But the last two years were so dry that we could not get enough feed for the hogs. If you do not get moisture for the dry feed you cannot make fat hogs. In 1915 we had magnificent crops and in 1916, and I thought I would go back and tell the fellows what they were missing and I went down in a fine car to show them. What did I see when I went down there? Ladies and gentlemen, on the very spot where I shot rabbits in my boyhood days, I found standing a magnificent sugar beet factory turning out tons and tons of sugar. I



found in other places canning factories turning out all kinds of canned goods and selling canned tomatoes at eight cents a can. I saw towns and villages with modern schools. I saw churches of the finest kind. There was industry; there was prosperity on every hand. I saw the benefits of irrigation.

I returned to Canada. I love Canada. I love its people. I love my neighbors. I am going to stick. I am following out my father's advice. I am going to stay, but let me tell you there is a serious proposition concerning us in Southern Alberta. We have been here long enough to realize the fact. The other day I said to a neighbor of mine: "You struck it right when you sold your cattle since it has got so dry you could not feed them." He thought a minute and raised his head and said: "I don't know. Did I make a good trade." He said: "I have sold the last cow I had, and the few cattle I have been years and years in gathering. My wife, my boys all economized with me and those years blessed our home with the cattle and I took the money I got from the sale of the cattle and bought seed and feed"; and he said: "Today I have neither seed, feed nor cattle." He once had a happy and contented home. His boys were satisfied. His wife was happy. His girls were satisfied in the country, but today, all is changed. His boys are wondering if it is good sound business to continue along this line. They have asked: "Father, is it not dangerous to continue along this line?"; and he fears now that they are losing confidence in his judgment. That to him was the most serious question.

We have in Southern Alberta magnificent streams. We have reservoir sites without measure in which all this water can be stored and kept for our use. I want to tell you that when that is done and the water is brought on the land you will behold in southern Alberta a great and powerful colony. You will find industries in every direction. You will find contented and happy homes; boys, who will grow up to be good sound and loyal citizens of Canada and who will lay down their lives for the flag which has so nobly been done by the boys of this country. It will make it possible to live in a happy, contented country.

I would say to the government, give us that relief. We are of the Anglo-Saxon race and we want to make our way in the world with all the ingenuity and energy we possess.







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